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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 ASHGABAT 001552

SIPDIS

STATE FOR SCA/CEN, EEB

E.O. 12958: DECL: 12/02/2018

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SUBJECT: FM MEREDOV PROVIDES OVERVIEW OF U.S.- TURKMENISTAN
BILATERAL RELATIONSHIP

Classified By: Charge d'Affaires a.i. Richard Miles for reasons 1.4 (B)
and (D).

11. (C) SUMMARY: During a recent call by Charge d'Affaires Richard Miles on Turkmenistan Foreign Minister Rashid Meredov, the Minister provided his perspective on U.S.-Turkmenistan relations and areas for expanded engagement. Addressing the political, economic and cultural spheres, Meredov outlined areas for expanded cooperation in security assistance, trade and business development and educational exchanges and training. Describing Turkmen-Azeri relations in light of the Azeri president's recent visit, he said Turkmenistan's policy is to develop "brotherly relations" with all its neighbors, while acknowledging that the two energy-rich countries need to cooperate. The trilateral Turkmen, Azeri, Turkish summit focused on energy and transportation cooperation. END SUMMARY.

U.S.-TURKMEN RELATIONS: CONSTRUCTIVE AND POSITIVE

12. (C) On December 1, Charge Miles engaged in a wide-ranging discussion with Foreign Minister Meredov. Meredov noted that their previous meetings during Eurasian Energy Diplomacy Coordinator Steven Mann's visit had focused on the energy sector, but that U.S.-Turkmenistan relations were much broader, touching on many areas. Characterizing our relations as "constructive and positive," he said the Turkmen side is ready to expand our relations further. He described the numerous visits by USG officials during the past year as productive and illustrating the healthy condition of our political dialogue.

APPRECIATION FOR EFFECTIVE U.S. SECURITY ASSISTANCE

13. (C) FM Meredov identified three distinct spheres in our bilateral relationship: political, trade/economic, and cultural/humanitarian. In the political sphere, FM Meredov referred to our "detailed political dialogue" on international questions and bilateral issues, including joint efforts in security matters, strengthening of borders and counternarcotics cooperation. He expressed appreciation to the U.S. Government for effective programs that have already been completed and for those that are planned for the future. Law enforcement and military cooperation is particularly

welcome, notwithstanding Turkmenistan's neutral status, in areas such as military medical training, staff training and civil defense. Meredov also noted that, in his view, close contacts between the MFA and the Embassy are useful and provide a good opportunity to exchange views, regardless of whether or not there is agreement. Such exchanges do not just end with words, but result in concrete activities.

LOOKING TO EXPAND U.S.-TURKMEN BUSINESS ACTIVITY

¶4. (C) In the area of trade and economic relations, Meredov began by mentioning Turkmenistan's purchases of American aircraft, tractors, construction technology and power stations. However, he remarked that, in the economic sphere, there is a lot more that the two sides can accomplish. In particular, U.S. companies can expand their activities. President Berdimuhamedov's clear policy is to work with foreign partners. FM Meredov suggested that it is time for the Turkmen government and the U.S.-Turkmenistan Business Council to conduct a joint meeting. Recognizing that such a meeting could be conducted in different ways, he proposed an Ashgabat meeting as an option, citing the presence of all necessary conditions including hotels. He hoped to see the meeting take place next year and urged the Council to consider concrete timing for the event. If in Ashgabat, FM Meredov said the Turkmen government would organization a meeting "at the highest level" for the participants. At the same time, Meredov said they want to work with small and medium-size businesses.

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¶5. (C) Touching on cultural and humanitarian activities, FM Meredov mentioned Peace Corps' fifteen year presence in Turkmenistan, as well as student and teacher exchange programs such as FLEX. He said the GOTX is looking for ways to expand educational cooperation with the United States, citing increased contacts with universities such as the program with the University of Texas. There will also be greater opportunities for individual students to study specialized subjects abroad. He called for greater systemization of the programs that bring U.S. scholars and scientists to Turkmenistan, specifically mentioning the fields of energy, oil and gas, basic science such as physics and chemistry, and the humanities, including archeology. He urged that such educational exchanges go beyond ceremonial activities and become more involved in concrete, substantive scientific work.

BERIMUHAMEDOV AND ALIYEV REACH "AN UNDERSTANDING"

¶6. (C) Concerning Azerbaijan President Ilham Aliyev's recent visit, FM Meredov said it was a "logical continuation of the great work" that is ongoing between the two leaders and two governments in order to "activate" relations. By way of background, Meredov explained that the two presidents first met on the margins of a CIS summit in St. Petersburg in June 2007. Following that meeting, an intergovernmental commission was created, which earlier this year resolved financial issues. With Berdimuhamedov's May visit to Baku, "many new pages were opened in the relationship." Political issues have been resolved and trade turnover will reach USD 500 million this year. Aliyev's recent visit was meant to deepen "brotherly relations" between Turkmenistan and Azerbaijan, consistent with Berdimuhamedov's policy of developing such relations with all its neighbors on the basis of both shared cultural traits and as a practical matter.

¶7. (C) FM Meredov said Aliyev's visit had great significance as the two countries need to develop relations in various spheres. While both are powerful in energy resources, they need to cooperate "reasonably and on an equal basis." Berdimuhamedov's pipeline diversification policy is "a practical matter, not just words." Together with Russia, China and Iran pipelines, Turkmenistan "still wants and needs" a Western outlet for its gas and is ready to

facilitate such a route, but it also has its norms -- to sell gas at its borders to any buyer. Azerbaijan stands ready to deliver gas as a transit country. This was confirmed during Aliyev's visit. Meredov said there is "an understanding" between the presidents and the countries. Concerning delimitation in the Caspian, the process is ongoing. In June, the presidents agreed to regularize the bilateral format for discussions and, according to Meredov, "the mechanism works," citing the "rational, calm rhythm" of ongoing discussions. He said any meeting of leaders gives impulse to efforts and they will continue discussions on the principle of mutual respect.

¶8. (C) Two agreements were signed in the transport and communications sphere, the route across the Caspian "forming a bridge between Europe and Central Asia." One agreement provides for a railroad ferry, the other normalizes rail and maritime regulations between Turkmenistan and Azerbaijan. Meredov noted that modern transport demands modern technology and that, while the Turkmenbashi port currently works normally, Berdimuhamedov has proposed the idea for the port to be modernized to become a regional transport hub. Such a project would also be an area for cooperation with Azerbaijan.

¶9. (C) Concerning the atmospherics of Aliyev's visit, Meredov volunteered only that the two presidents, on a personal level, have good relations, in part because they are members of the same generation. He mentioned that future plans for the Turkmen-Azeri relations include a joint cultural forum in Ashgabat next year. FM Meredov said the Turkmen considered

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Aliyev's visit to be very successful.

A FEW WORDS ABOUT THE TRILATERAL SUMMIT

¶10. (C) The trilateral summit between the Turkmen, Azeri and Turkish presidents that took place in Turkmenbashi on November 29 was based on the "historical, brotherly relations" of the three countries and on strong political logic because of their traditional unity. Meredov clarified that while each is independent and has its own policies, they also share much in the "spiritual and economic spheres." All three countries are interested in the energy sector, Turkmenistan and Azerbaijan as producers, Turkey as an enormous consumer and transit country to Southern Europe. As such, it is correct for them to look at cooperation in energy matters. Similarly, all three countries are interested in transport across the Caspian. These common interests made the trilateral format appropriate, although it was not a "formal meeting."

¶11. (C) COMMENT. Despite the Charge's repeated efforts to elicit more substantive remarks about the bilateral and trilateral meetings, the Minister stuck firmly to generalities. In discussing U.S.-Turkmenistan relations, however, Meredov demonstrated a clear grasp of the details, referring to specific programs such as the FLEX program and cooperation with the University of Texas. While he stated a clear preference for concrete results over empty words, it's not clear that the GOTX is ready to expand our engagement to the extent he suggested in his remarks, at least not in the short term. Nonetheless, he indicated a willingness to broaden and deepen relations in numerous areas, giving insight into aspects of our relationship that are priorities for the Turkmen.

¶12. (C) COMMENT CONTINUED. Although details about the trilateral meetings are scarce, comments that the Charge heard from the Turkish ambassador indicated that the meetings, which included only the leaders, were serious talks. The bilateral meeting between the Turkmen and Turkish presidents, planned for 25 minutes, instead lasted 45 minutes. When Aliyev joined the other two presidents, the joint meeting lasted two hours (twice the allotted time), followed by a two-hour private lunch without neckties. The

summit concluded with a cultural event before the leaders
departed. END COMMENT.
MILES